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Report on General Assembly and Oil Conference of ASPO Switzerland, September 26th 2009, University of Basel

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This report concerns the second annual General Assembly of [ASPO Switzerland](#) held in conjunction with its annual [Peak Oil Conference](#).

I had reported here at TOD also about [last year's conference](#). The discrepancy couldn't be bigger. Last year's conference was held May 24, 2008. At that time, the oil price was at \$135/barrel and rising fast. Consequently, the aula of the University of Basel was filled to the last seat (400 people attended the meeting), Swiss TV was present, and several newspapers had sent reporters to gather first-hand information about this important event.

This year, with an oil price of \$65/barrel and holding steady, ASPO's Peak Oil Conference was a no-event. There were roughly 100 attendees, you could call them the Peak Oil "diehards," and both TV and the press were absent. It was an event, where "insiders" were talking to each other, whereas the public at large couldn't care less.

It was an interesting event nevertheless.

ASPO Switzerland differs in its "business model" from most other national ASPO organizations. ASPO

Switzerland has individual members, each of whom pays an annual membership fee of CHF 100 (roughly \$100). The organization has meanwhile also three industrial members, companies working to reduce the dependence of Switzerland on fossil fuels, among them a company installing solar systems and one specialized in thermal insulation of homes, that each pays an annual membership fee of CHF 3000.

By the summer of 2008, ASPO Switzerland had 350 individual members. The number of members was growing almost as fast as the oil price. Since the oil price peak of 2008, ASPO Switzerland has picked up another 20 members, i.e., most of those who had joined the organization in 2008 renewed their membership in 2009 in spite of the loss of interest in the topic by the mass media.

This year's conference opened with a talk by [Daniele Ganser](#), President of ASPO Switzerland and a historian by trade who is specializing in the study of resource wars. Daniele is an experienced speaker, and his talk was well received. He is clearly the backbone of ASPO Switzerland. He offers between 30-40 talks every year to different organizations here in Switzerland, and he talks about Peak Oil to everyone willing to listen. In particular, he travels frequently to our capital, Berne, to talk to our politicians.

ASPO Switzerland counts among its members [23 members of the Swiss National Parliament](#), i.e., close to 10% of all national parliamentarians are individual members of ASPO Switzerland. These include politicians from all political parties. They have meanwhile formed a parliamentary study group to discuss the potential consequences of Peak Oil for Switzerland.

After Daniele Ganser, we heard a talk by [Christa Markwalder](#), a member of the big chamber of the Swiss parliament (corresponding to a Representative to the U.S. Congress). She presented an overview of the discussions that have taken place in the Swiss parliament in the last 10 years concerning the issues of Peak Oil. She told us that several parliamentarians individually and also the Peak Oil study group as a body have made a number of "inquiries" to the National Council (the executive branch of the Swiss government) asking them specific questions about Peak Oil and what they planned to do about them.

Until now, it was difficult to get the attention of the National Council. The reason is that they orient themselves exclusively on the annual [World Energy Outlook](#) of the [International Energy Agency](#). What the IEA writes is the gospel ... even though they change their story quite frequently, which makes long-term planning a tad difficult.

In its 2008 edition, the World Energy Outlook mentioned Peak Oil for the first time explicitly, and so, there is hope that our National Council may now take inquiries by our parliamentarians more seriously as well.

After Christa Markwalder, we heard a talk by [Nicola Ruch](#), one among three high-school students, who had won this year a prize of [Schweizer Jugend forscht](#) (Swiss Youth Science Fair) for their end-of-high-school project that they had written on *Peak Oil: Die Menschheit auf dem Scheitelpunkt ihrer Entwicklung* (Peak Oil: Humanity at the Zenith of its Development).

It was an emotional talk. Whereas I am skeptical that our politicians will ever do more than just talk about the problem, here I saw a *vision*, and a *mission* to make that vision a reality, and a *passion* to pursue that mission. After his talk, Christa Markwalder asked Nicola whether she could get a copy of his end-of-high-school project report. She would like to read it.

We then heard briefly from two CEOs of industrial ASPO members about their companies and their vision as to how to address the issues surrounding fossil fuel depletion.

After the break, [Alex von Zelewsky](#), an emeritus professor of the University of Fribourg and board member of ASPO Switzerland, talked about *Die Wissenschaft und der Peak Oil* (Science and Peak Oil) and offered seven postulates concerning different aspects of Peak Oil.

The conference ended with a presentation by myself entitled [Die 2000-Watt-Gesellschaft als Lösung?](#) (Is the 2000 Watt Society a Solution?).

The roughly 100 participants, mostly ASPO members, who attended the event, went home satisfied. ASPO Switzerland had done a good job catering to its members. Yet, the annual conference ought to serve also as a forum of outreach to people who have not spent much thought on the issues surrounding Peak Oil ever before, and in this respect, the conference was an almost complete failure. It probably will take another rapid increase in the crude oil price to draw their attention.